

ENVIRONMENT

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Hausa, and partly from Bornu, in historical times.¹ Nor is the cultivation of yam an original cultural possession of the Nupe, which is proved by two facts: first, that the Nupe north and east of the Niger are unfamiliar with certain important ways of preparing yam common in all 'real' yam countries, e.g. the drying of yam; and second, that yam, though to-day an important staple food, has still no place in their sacrifices, ritual meals, and first-crop ceremonies; only corn and millet may be used for these ritual offerings.² Cassava, finally, has only been introduced in the last thirty years; thirty years ago, I was told by a missionary, it was almost unknown in Nupe. Thus communication and culture contact have helped to mould the physical environment of to-day. This manifold agricultural system, however, could not have been evolved if the natural conditions of the country had not been favourable. The meeting of south and north in the vegetation of Nupe, the coexistence of marsh-land and savannah country, the natural irrigation and the strips and patches of thick forest, all this was as essential to the development of the productive system of the country as was the inventiveness and stage of civilization of its people. We cannot attempt to decide which factor, environment or civilization, has had the larger share in this development. The rigid distinction between environment and culture has long been abandoned as misleading and futile. For our investigation it is irrelevant. We can well regard the environment as it appears at present, the natural resources as they are utilized by the people to-day, as a unitary complex of factors the effect of which, upon the life and well-being of the people, we have to examine.

CLIMATE

Nupe, lower lying than any of the neighbouring districts, with its two big rivers, their dry, blazing sand-banks in the dry season, and their vast swamps in the rains, is one of the hottest and at the same time most humid districts of Nigeria. The river valleys especially, and the hollow in which Bida is situated, are damp, airless, and unhealthy. The following figures give the average temperature, humidity, and rainfall in Bida for 1933:³

TABLE I

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Annual total
Minimum temp.	60	70	72	72	71	71	68	68	68	70	70	67	..
Maximum temp.	81	96	102	103	98	88	92	90	85	91	96	96	..
Humidity (per cent.)	60	50	66	71	78	92	92	92	85	76	75	62	..
Rainfall (in inches)	2.90	..	..	1.99	3.06	12.33	15.41	15.82	11.87	2.39	0.32	..	66.08

¹ It is still practised to-day by the Bornu settlers of Kutigi.

² There is one exception: Mokwa, in the north-west corner of Nupe, where yam is sacrificed at certain annual rites. But the exception proves the rule, for Mokwa is the gate for cultural influences from Yoruba.

³ This table was copied from the readings taken regularly in Bida Middle School.

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 ● 132 The highest temperature measured in Bida was 106 in the shade, only
 164 a few degrees lower than in the hottest (but driest) district of Nigeria,
 Bornu. The humidity of Bida, on the other hand, almost equals the
 humidity in the rain-forest belt. The combination of features from
 south and north which seems characteristic of Nupe country has its
 most unfavourable aspect in climatic conditions. The influence of the
 unfavourable climate upon the health of the natives is evident in the
 large proportion of people suffering from lung-trouble and rheumatic
 diseases. Climate and soil combine to even more deadly effects: full of
 malaria-carrying mosquitoes, the river forests infested with tsetse-fly,
 and all watercourses polluted with bilharzia, Nupe is indeed an ill-
 favoured country.

231 The tsetse-infected areas have played their part in Nupe history. The
 forest belt in the south, of which the strips of river forest in Nupe are
 the northernmost outposts, marks the southern boundary of cattle and
 horse in Nigeria. The parts of Nupe which are free from tsetse are also
 safe for horses and cattle (more precisely, the northern breed of cattle,
 which is not immune from trypanosomiasis). Nupe country, with the
 neighbouring Ilorin—the southernmost country in which horses can be
 kept and to which the nomadic Fulani herdsmen can take their cattle—
 became also the southern outpost of the Fulani Empire, the southern-
 most stronghold of that race of cattle-people and horsemen whose
 spectacular conquest of Nigeria was stemmed only by the natural bul-
 wark of the forest belt.

HEALTH AND DISEASE

164 In the Census of 1931 Nupe appears among the districts with the
 732 highest proportion of blindness, leprosy, and insanity.¹ In the case of
 leprosy the Census estimate of over 5, and possibly over 10, per thousand
 is hardly exaggerated—even casual observation shows this, although the
 fear and secrecy that surround this disease among the Nupe make a
 more precise estimate impossible. Information which I obtained on the
 spot, from the Medical Officer in charge of Bida Native Administration
 Hospital, rather went to show that blindness is not more frequent in
 Nupe than elsewhere in Nigeria. As regards the proportion of insanity,
 158 I have seen too few cases to venture any definite opinion. A remark on
 the nature of the mental disorders, however, may not be without interest.
 Of the five cases which I have seen three showed clear symptoms of
 paranoid schizophrenia—strongly delusional thinking, to the extent of
 persecution mania, combined with violent aggressiveness which
 appeared and subsided with marked suddenness, and involving no
 general degeneration of normal intellectual functions. Two cases were
 simple forms of imbecility.²

¹ *Census of Nigeria, 1931* (London, 1933). The Census figures refer partly to the tribe, i.e. to random samples of Nupe (ii, pp. 110-11), partly to the political district of Bida Emirate (ii, p. 397), and partly to Niger Province as a whole ('Nupe Province' in the old terminology), the population of which consists to two-thirds of Nupe (i, pp. 41-2, ii, p. 38).

² See p. 402.